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[00:00:45] **Unidentified** I got an idea. It's better.

[00:07:19] **Speaker 1** The following program.

[00:07:20] **Speaker 2** Is a PBS Wisconsin.

[00:07:21] **Speaker 1** Original Production.

[00:07:36] **Speaker 3** Welcome to Wisconsin Public Media's coverage of Governor Tony Evers, fifth State of the State address. We are bringing you live coverage tonight from the Wisconsin state capital in Madison. In a few moments, the 46th governor of Wisconsin will make his way into the assembly chambers.

[00:07:54] **Speaker 2** Evers will speak tonight before a joint session of the Wisconsin assembly and Senate. The state Supreme court, his cabinet and tribal leaders. Good evening. I'm Shawn Johnson from Wisconsin Public Radio.

[00:08:05] **Speaker 3** And I'm Frederica Freyberg from PBS, Wisconsin. Tonight, Democratic Governor Tony Evers lays out his plans for 2023. He'll be speaking to the 106th session of the Wisconsin legislature.

[00:08:18] **Speaker 2** Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who represents communities in Racine County, will provide this year's Republican response immediately following the governor's state of the state address.

[00:08:28] **Speaker 3** And so the governor has not yet made his way through the assembly parlor where we sit just off the assembly chambers. But the full chambers are getting ready to welcome Governor Tony Evers.

[00:08:42] **Speaker 2** Like introductions out there. There's a lot of new members in the crowd watching their first state of the state speech this time. You are going to see some familiar patterns, I'm sure, with Republicans not applauding some of the certain pieces of the governor's speech. Democrats vigorously applauding this kind of the theater of the this speech. You have a large contingent of Republican lawmakers there. Obviously, this time, the Republican majorities of the last few sessions got bigger in the last election. And we can tell you now that the governor is about to make his way to the front of the assembly chamber. He's getting ready here in the parlor with senators who will escort him up the aisle.

[00:09:25] **Speaker 3** And so I was looking just off camera to get a glimpse of the governor and his entourage, as it were, as he makes his way into the chambers. Now, this really could be regarded as a victory lap for Governor Tony Evers having won reelection in the last election. And, you know, also the governor and the entire legislature, the budget writers, they have a lot of money to work with.

[00:09:49] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I mean, that's going to be a theme throughout this entire legislative session. You're going to likely hear the governor allude to that tonight in his address. He has a projected budget surplus, the likes of which no governor has dealt with before. So that leads to a lot of opportunities. Of course, whatever he wants to do is going to need approval of the Republican legislature in that room there and vice versa. So how they do that will be kind of the story of this upcoming, you know, session, the next six or seven months.

[00:10:23] **Speaker 3** The governor of the great state of Wisconsin, the honorable Tony Evers.

[00:10:56] **Unidentified** Governor, Governor Tony Evers.

[00:10:58] **Speaker 2** Making his way down the aisle, shaking hands with the Democratic state representatives and senators on one side of the aisle, Republicans right now on the other side of the aisle. This is the time of the night when everybody is still friendly. Nobody's dug in just yet. Start of a new session speech hasn't gotten going yet. You know, it's all handshakes and smiles at this point of the evening.

[00:11:21] **Speaker 3** I will say that, you know, ahead of this, there had been talk whether it's naive to believe it could be true, that there would be some working between the governor and the Republican majority legislature. I mean.

[00:11:36] **Speaker 2** It didn't happen on a lot of big stuff in the first four years. You know, there were a record number of vetoes by the governor in the last two years session. There's a lot on which they disagree. But I think being elected to a second term and by a larger margin this time, you could argue, kind of makes him legit in the eyes of some Republican lawmakers who are maybe viewing his first term as like a four year blip. They obviously can't view it that way anymore. He's governor. And so there may be maybe some areas like local government funding where they find a way to work together.

[00:12:15] **Unidentified** Let's listen to.

[00:12:28] **Speaker 2** At this time, I introduce to you the governor of the great state of Wisconsin, the honorable Tony Evers.

[00:12:47] **Unidentified** Thank you so much.

[00:12:49] **Speaker 1** Good evening, Wisconsin. Honorable Supreme court justices. Our great tribal nation leaders, constitutional officers, major general nap. Members of the wisconsin national guard and active and retired members of our armed forces. Cabinet members. Senate president camping majority leader lammy hear minority leader eager Speaker Vos and Minority Leader Neubauer. Legislators. Distinguished guests. And to all the Wisconsinites joining joining us, whether you're here tonight or whether you're in the gallery or watching from home. Thanks so much for being here tonight. I'm Tony Evers, and I am proud to be standing here tonight as a as the 46th governor of the great state of Wisconsin to deliver my fifth state of the state address.

[00:13:51] **Unidentified** And it's. And it's good to be back. It's good to be back.

[00:13:58] **Speaker 1** My son, Nick and his wife Linda are with us tonight. And my former kindergarten classmate Kathy, is up in the gallery. We celebrated our 50th. We've celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary last year, and this year we'll be celebrating our 54th year of going to the Wisconsin State Fair together. How about that? Kathleen Frances, thank you so much for your relentless support, understanding, really good humor and insight. I love you so much. Thank you. May 29th, 1848. President Fox upon excuse me, signed a bill making Wisconsin a state that means in 2023 we'll be celebrating Wisconsin 175th birthday. And I am proud to report to you tonight that in 175 years of statehood, our state has never been in a better fiscal position than it is today. When we began our work together four years ago, our roads and bridges were in disrepair. We'd sent back tens of millions of dollars of your tax dollars to Washington, D.C. that could have been used to expand high speed Internet. Our school rankings dropped to 18th in the country. At one point, support for our university system had been cut by hundreds of millions of dollars. And our state was not actively working to address climate change or invest in clean energy. Well, I am proud to say that the state of our state is much different today. We've gotten to work fixing the darn roads. I even helped fill some of those potholes by myself. By the way, it's not a full time job for me. And I stand here tonight. I'm proud to report we've worked together to repair and improve over 5800 miles of roads and nearly 1600 bridges across our state.

[00:16:55] **Unidentified** We've also gotten we've.

[00:16:56] **Speaker 1** Also gotten back on track preparing our state and our workforce and our economy for this century. Over the last four years, we've allocated more than $340 million into expanding high speed Internet more than any other administration. Our state's history. More than 387,000 homes and bridges will have new or improved access to reliable high speed Internet. And I want to double that number by the end of this term. And together we will do that. We've also created the Council on Health Equity and charged them with preparing a blueprint for reducing and eliminating health disparities across our state. We created the state's first ever plan to respond to and mitigate the effects of climate change. I signed an executive order creating the first ever Office of Environmental Justice to develop strategies that will help us address disparate impacts of climate change in communities across the state. Our state now has a clean energy plan with strategies to help lower energy bills for working families, reduce our reliance on out-of-state energy sources, invest in job training and apprenticeship programs in innovative industries and technologies, and create an estimated more than 40,000 jobs by 2030. I've also kept my promises. I vetoed every bill before me that restricted reproductive freedom. Excuse me. We've also delivered a 10% tax cut for working families. We increased investments in our public transit and our university system and technical college. We've convened a blue ribbon commission to help develop solutions and create opportunities for Wisconsin's veterans. And last October, we took the commission's recommendations and announced $10 million to support veterans mental health. Create a rental assistance program for homeless veterans and to expand veterans access to skills and job training. We've gotten to work these last four years making smart strategic investments and our state's economy shows it. Over the last four years, unemployment has hit record lows and we've had the highest number of people employed ever. Our state has a triple-A bond credit rating for the first time in about 40 years. That means we're able to get lower interest rates and save your tax dollars. Our general fund and rainy day fund both ended the last year, last fiscal year, at the highest levels ever in our state's 175 year history. We're now expected to end the current biennium with about a $6.5 billion in our state coffers and over $1.7 billion in the rainy day fund. And that's great news, Wisconsin. It means we can continue our progress making the wise investments we've long needed to do, and not because anyone wants to make government bigger, but because Wisconsinites want a government that works and works better. We have roads and bridges to fix schools, to fun kids, to support communities, to keep safe water, to keep clean, and a future we've built together after years of neglect. Today, we must work to protect. We've worked to invest in public education at every level. After a decade of disinvestment, we passed the largest increase in special education aid in state's history. Our K through 12 schools have now returned to the top ten in their country. But we also know our current system is not sustainable. For years, communities have raised their own property taxes to keep their local schools afloat. And while some school districts have successfully passed referenda to help keep the lights on, many have tried and failed. The system means drastic differences in outcomes for our kids, creating winners and losers, haves and have nots. Doing what's best for our kids has always been what's best for our state, and today we cannot afford to do more. So I'm going to deliver on the promise I made before the election to use a portion of our state's historic surplus to make an historic investment in our kids and in our schools.

[00:22:46] **Unidentified** We're going to make.

[00:22:47] **Speaker 1** Targeted investments to improve reading and literacy outcomes and expand financial literacy curriculum across our state. We're going to invest $20 million to increase literacy related programing and implement evidence based reading practices across Wisconsin. And our Do the Math initiative will help ensure our kids have the tools and skills to make smart budgeting and financial decisions to prepare for their future. We also know that if we want to get our kids caught up in achieving at their highest potential, that we need to reduce and keep class sizes. Small schools need resources to retain experienced educators and recruit new, talented folks to join in our classrooms. So I'm proposing a pathway to get experienced educators back into the workforce by making it easier for school districts to hire retired teachers and staff. And we're going to invest $20 million into recruiting, developing and retaining teachers and student teachers, including $10 million for our local homegrown educators to bolster our educator pipeline and ensure it's sustainable for the future. We also have work to do to get our kids caught up from the past few years. We all want to improve outcomes and ensure our kids are prepared for success. I believe that together we will and we'll start by making sure our kids can bring their full and best selves to our schools and to our classrooms. Now, we cannot overstate the profound impact that the past three years have had on our kids in many ways, and that includes their mental health. According to the Office of Children's Mental Health 2022 report, about one third of our kids experience sadness and hopelessness. Hopelessness excuse me, every day. That's every day. A 10% increase over the last decade. Kids in crisis are often distracted or disengaged. Are disengaged in class. Might be may. Might not be able to finish their homework and won't be able to focus on their studies at home or at school. Improving student mental health can also improve student learning outcomes and school attendance while reducing bullying, risky behaviors, violence, involvement in the juvenile justice system and substance misuse. So over the last year, we've doubled our investment in our Get Kids Ahead initiative, investing $30 million of our federal pandemic relief funds to provide every Wisconsin public school district with new resources to expand school based mental health services. Tonight, I'm announcing we're going to make Get Kids Ahead a permanent state program. And we're investing more than $270 million to ensure every student have access, has access to mental health services. The last few years have affected our kids mental and behavioral health and adults mental health, too. We've seen a record high opioid related overdose deaths, and Wisconsin's 988 Suicide and crisis Lifeline received 6000 calls just in the first month of its launch this past July. The state of mental health in Wisconsin is a quiet, burgeoning crisis that I believe will have catastrophic consequences for generations if we don't treat it with the urgency it requires. Mental and behavioral health is as much of a health issue as it is an economic one. It affects kids in the classroom. It affects workers being able to join, join and stay in our workforce. It affects whether folks are able to stay in safe housing or have economic security. It affects folks ability to take care of and provide for their family and loved ones. So tonight, I'm declaring 2023, a year of mental health. And together with our Get Kids Ahead initiative investment, we'll be making an overall investment of about $500 million to expand access to mental and behavioral health services for the people of Wisconsin. 2022. A report by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute indicates that there are 440 people for each mental health provider in Wisconsin. And even before the pandemic, a 2019 report from the institute indicated that 55 of Wisconsin's 72 counties have significant shortages of psychiatrists. So we're also going to invest in making sure we have adequate available mental health professionals who can provide the treatment Wisconsinites need across our state. We're going to invest in developing a robust prevention strategies to reduce suicide health, self-harm and other mental and behavioral health related injuries, and that includes state resources to support 988 the new Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which went live in 2022. Thanks to our our Senator, Senator Tammy Baldwin, as well as increased support for peer run and community based services across the state. Mental health deals with everybody here, you know, not just this side, this side also.

[00:29:40] **Unidentified** We cannot look we cannot look.

[00:29:41] **Speaker 1** Back two years from now as we prepare the next budget and wonder whether we should have done more and sooner to take good care of our mental health. Let's take this seriously and let's start today. Mental health is just one issue facing our state that needs urgent attention and action. I've also spent four years trying to get some folks in, some of them in this room, believing that fires are a pressing threat to our state's economy and our health and our well-being and our way of life. I created the state's People's Action Council to prepare the state's first ever People's Action Plan. We set enforceable PFAS drinking of surface water standards for the first time ever. Attorney General Call and I have filed a lawsuit against more than a dozen defendants who we believe contributed to PFAS contamination and make sure Wisconsinites won't have to foot the bill for cleaning it up. I also directed $10 million that will help get people's nitrates and other harmless, harmful contaminants out of about 1000 private wells in Wisconsin. Our clean drinking water has been a priority for my administration from day from day one. We've also proposed efforts and resources and ideas to make headway on people's and other contaminants that have been obstructed, delayed and outright rejected. So tonight, I implore you again to join us in this fight. Work we must do to address fires and other contaminants grows harder and more expensive with each day of delay. Partizan Politics cannot keep getting in the way of this work while Wisconsinites worry about the water coming from their tap. Clean water must be a top priority from us, from prefers to lead to nitrates and it will be in my executive budget announced next month. I am proposing to invest more than $100 million to take a three pronged approach to confronting PFOA across the state. We're going to increase people's testing, sampling and monitoring statewide so that we can find these contaminants and get them out of the water. We're going to make more resources available to on the ground partners to respond to PFAS contamination when it happens. And we're going to work to increase awareness about the dangers of pufas so folks can take steps to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. Whether it's PFA cars and clean water, supporting our farmers and our agriculture industry, finding more district attorneys and public defenders, expanding access to affordable housing and child care. Every level of government policy working together to address the challenges facing our state and the state must do its part. If we want our local partners to help us with this important work. But we also know that for the last decade, local communities have been asked to do more with less. State aid has gone down while costs have gone up. While help from the state was cut by more than 9%, public safety costs have skyrocketed more than 16%. Communities across Wisconsin have been have made difficult decisions that cut critical services, including public safety. Last fall, I announced a plan to invest over $100 million to help our local governments fund essential services and communities across our state. That includes a new $10 million program to help specifically fund public safety services like EMS, police and fire. The bottom line for me has always been making sure our communities have the resources they need to meet basic and unique needs alike. But there are a lot of different ways we can find compromise to achieve that goal, and together we will. So as we keep working together on a plan, let's find common ground. I'm announcing tonight that I will work together on a budget provision that will send a total of up to 20% of the state's sales tax revenue back to our local communities for shared revenue. This commitment will ensure our communities will see growth and shared revenue in the future after years of state investment not keeping up with their community needs. And it means more than a half a billion dollars more per year and new resources to invest in key priorities like EMS, fire and law enforcement services, transportation, local health and human services, and other challenges facing our communities. The state must fulfill its obligation to fund our communities, just like we must fully fund our public schools and invest in clean water. Our state and our economy and our workforce depend on these investments. At the same time, just because we're in the greatest fiscal position in state's history doesn't mean we can afford to be careless. Wisconsinites have to work too hard and have have gone through too much. For us, the return to austerity. Now is the time to stay prudent, stay safe, smart, and be bold with reasonable investments to keep building a lasting legacy of prosperity. So cutting taxes is part of our agenda, just as it has been for the last four years. We've kept more money in Wisconsinites pockets and delivered the largest tax cut in state's history. And we can do more. But I also want to be clear tonight, splurging $3.5 billion to hand out big breaks through wealthiest 23 of the wealthiest 20% of earners isn't responsible. It's it's a bit reckless. When we deliver tax relief and we will deliver tax relief, we're going to do it responsibly by ensuring we can keep taxes low and are now and in the future. And we'll do it without driving our state into debt or causing devastating cuts to priorities like public schools and public safety. Spending billions on a flat tax isn't a workforce plan or an economic development plan. We need to bolster the middle class. We need to maintain our economy's momentum. And we need to reduce barriers to work and recruit and retain talent to address our state's workforce challenges. We have a plan to responsibly address all three priorities, and we can begin here tonight. A key priority in our strategy for investing federal pandemic aid was supporting Wisconsin's small businesses. Our workforce and long term economic development. And we are successful. A new 2023 report shows that the share of aid we received under the American Rescue Plan Act. Wisconsin ranks number one in the country for both the aid we directed to support businesses and aid redirected towards economic development. We invested more than $800 million to provide grants of tens of thousands of businesses to respond to and get through the pandemic to make healthy and safe improvements, purchasing inventory, affording payroll and rent, and to keep the lights on. Through our successful Main Street Bounce back grand grant program. I'm proud to announce tonight that we've helped more than 8500 Wisconsin small businesses expand and move into vacant storefronts and communities across all 70 all 72 counties. If you travel around the state like I do, you can see literally see the transformative impacts that investments have made in corridors and communities across Wisconsin. Take Fond du Lac, for example, right by where Kathy and I grew up in Plymouth Cheese capital of the world. By the way, some things haven't changed much over the years, like ithis right downtown. And finally, where Kathy bought her first wedding or wedding? Not her first wedding. Her first and last wedding dress, I hope. And Lord. Right. But other things have changed. Even just. Even. Just in the last year alone. Monica, who owns a jewelry store and Find Act, is one of those businesses that received one of our Main Street bounce back grants. Monica took a chance, opening her store on a street, and finally, that at the time was surrounded by empty storefronts. She thought maybe, maybe in 5 to 10 years, other shops might fill in around her. Her shop opened its doors just about two years ago now. Today, Monica's small business is surrounded by new business storefronts, many of which received our Main Street bounce back grants. In fact, Monica's shop is doing so well. She's moving her business into a bigger space just a few blocks away. And. And this next one is good for everybody. When I visited Monica's shop, she told me I could never have done this in Florida or California. And she's probably right. But even four years ago, this dream might not have been possible in Wisconsin either. When we began our work together, Wisconsin was among the worst states in the country for startup creations. But much like downtown fond Wisconsinites, Wisconsin's changed a lot since then. Since 2019, we've seen significant increases in business startups. New business formations increased to more than 71,000. And that's a 42% increase between 2019 and 2021. And that was no accident for our economic recovery plan. Work by design. We knew that small businesses make up more than 99% of Wisconsin businesses. We knew that small businesses employ nearly half of Wisconsin workers. We knew that small businesses are more than likely to hire locally, reinvest locally, back into the community, buy their supplies locally. We fueled our economic recovery by harnessing the ingenuity and homegrown talent we already have right here in Wisconsin. It's why our focus must continue to be building our economy from the ground up, starting with our small businesses, our main streets, and the hearts of our community. Tonight, I'm excited to announce we're going to continue our Main Street Bounceback program in my biennial budget with a $50 million investment to provide as many as 5000 eligible businesses with grants up to $10,000 to help afford building repairs and improvements, lease and mortgage payments, and defray other expenses. That can be a barrier to someone's dream becoming a successful business. We're also going to ensure that more than 8500 small businesses have already received mainstream bounce back. Grants continue to thrive by investing up to $5 million into providing technical assistance, mentorships, educational training to these small business owners to ensure they have the support they need to continue their success. Our homegrown homegrown growing. Our homegrown innovators and entrepreneurs also need homegrown talent to support our local businesses and our local economies. And that's why this has been a top priority for us these past four years. We had record high job numbers in 2022, and really important sectors like construction, wholesale trade, professional scientific and technical services and transportation and utilities. Our registered apprenticeship program last year had the highest number of participants ever in our state history. And last year we added 14 new career pathways to our youth apprenticeship program. Construction in construction. Agriculture. Health. Science and science and engineering. We made a groundbreaking investment into three programs designed to address our state's post-pandemic workforce needs, including our Worker Advancement Initiative and our Worker Connection program, which helped provide more skills training, career coaching and connected connected unemployment. Unemployed workers with available jobs. We also recognize that we cannot solve our workforce challenges with a one size fits all from Madison approach. But superior needs superior needs to support its local workforce and economy might be different from the needs in Platteville and Milwaukee or Lacrosse or Marinette. So we created the Workforce Innovation Grant program and invested in 27 local projects across our state to develop long term, locally based solutions that meet the unique needs of local communities and regions. One of those projects at the Wisconsin Forestry Center at UW Stevens Point, is focus on developing the next generation of forestry professionals with the skills, curriculum and K-through-12 schools to get more young people into this critical profession. Another project with the Waupaca County Economic Development Corporation is expanding transportation services to make sure workers can get to work and around the clock, even third shift. Tonight, I'm announcing we're going to continue harnessing our local ingenuity through the workforce innovation grant with a $100 million investment in my budget to keep developing new, innovative ideas and locally based projects that will support our workforce and economic development based on what those communities and regions need. We're also going to invest $10 million in an initiative led by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to collaborate with industries in every sector of our state's economy to develop and implement initiatives to retain and attract talented workers. And you all know this We also need investments and targeted industries that we know have been hit hard by the pandemic, including the health care industry. I'll propose a historic $50 million investment to bolster Wisconsin's health care workforce, to expand our long term care providers, increase the number of mental health providers and psychiatrists, and expand the Wisconsin Nurse Education Educator program to provide high quality education for our future nurses. Pinelands State's Clean Energy Plan provides a blueprint for skills training, apprenticeships and creating good paying families, supporting jobs by investing in new, innovative industries and technologies. So we're going to invest nearly $10 million to expand clean energy, job training and reemployment, and reducing barriers for folks joining our clean energy workforce. But there's another critical factor that affects our state's workforce. And I hear about it everywhere I go, no matter which corner of the state I'm visiting. 54% of Wisconsinites today live in a child care desert where there are few to no high quality options for child care in their neighborhood or their community. And even if there were a neighbor nearby, a child care provider, it still might not be affordable for a working family. If we want to address our state's workforce challenges, we have to make sure child care is accessible and affordable. And together, we will.

[00:49:50] **Unidentified** So the first things first thing we're going to.

[00:49:52] **Speaker 1** Do to deliver on my promise to expand the child and dependent care credit, which will provide nearly $30 million in tax relief to more than 100,000 Wisconsinites. Through our Partner Up program. More than 200 employers from Prescott, Trivers are helping make childcare more affordable for their employees. We've also helped stabilize the childcare industry through our monthly childcare accounts program, providing the financial stability providers needed to stay open and recruit, retain quality staff to care for our kids. All told, we helped more than 3300 providers across the state keep their doors open and we helped more than 22,000 childcare professionals stay employed or become employed, and we helped ensure care for continued care, continuing for more than 113,000 kids across our state.

[00:51:06] **Unidentified** That's a big deal for. It is a big deal.

[00:51:11] **Speaker 1** These new programs made a big difference in the lives of kids and working families across the state. But the reality is that the federal funds that support them won't last forever. So we'll be continuing these programs to keep childcare affordable and accessible. In my budget, we're going to provide more than $340 million for child care accounts so providers can have the financial stability they need to keep the lights on, pay their workers fair competitive wages, and continue to provide high quality care to kids across the state. We'll also be investing more than $22 million into the partner Up program to expand partnerships between employers and childcare providers, because our employers are ready to play a role in ensuring workers have the access to affordable childcare and we're ready to support them. Wisconsin. We face much work ahead of us, but there is much opportunity. We can do big things in our next four years together. And if we are inspired not by power but by partnership, if we are dedicated not to selfish interests but to self-sacrifice, if we can forge new paths not through conflict, but through collaboration, then together we will.

[00:53:01] **Unidentified** So let's get to work, folks. Thank you so much. And on Wisconsin. Thank you. UW Marching band. Take it away.

[00:56:34] **Speaker 3** And so the University of Wisconsin marching band concluded Governor Tony Evers, fifth State of the State address before a joint session of the Wisconsin Assembly and Senate.

[00:56:44] **Speaker 2** Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who represents Rochester, Wisconsin, is making his way back to our location as we speak. He'll provide this year's Republican response in just a few minutes.

[00:56:55] **Speaker 3** Before Speaker Vos gets here. We can take a look at some of what Governor Evers had to say in his State of the State address. There were some big investment proposals in in this state of the state, including one shared revenue where he would put 20% of state sales taxes toward shared revenue for $500 million a year.

[00:57:20] **Speaker 2** That would be kind of a massive change. I mean, any time you're talking about setting aside a portion of the state sales tax, dedicating it to local governments from here on out, that's a big deal. And so, you know, we know Republicans have talked about doing something with shared revenue, something with local governments. It sounds like they're talking to the governor staff. I'm not sure they're on board with that. There was a lot in this speech. I mean, it was kind of like a mini budget address there with what are the proposals the governor is floating out there. He has a big budget address next month and a big budget surplus. And so that's why you're hearing from him. He has a lot of ideas and what he wants to do with it. And you heard a piece of that are big pieces that tonight.

[00:58:01] **Speaker 3** Yeah. Including the what was a $270 million toward mental health services for school students.

[00:58:10] **Speaker 2** Yeah. I mean, in the past, if you compare it to the overall budget surplus, which you're looking at six and a half billion dollars projected, it's not huge. But that is a sizable investment there. If you're talking about $270 million. You didn't hear obviously applause from Republicans when you heard the governor is floating out those numbers. They're going to have their own ideas for the budget, but he's not going to reduce his spending plan next month in his budget address.

[00:58:40] **Speaker 3** In fact, it was we we were commenting as we watched this speech how there literally was crickets from the Republican side of the aisle as the governor progressed down his ideas and his proposals for what he wants to do by way of partially, at least in this address, talking about this projected $6.5 billion surplus.

[00:59:04] **Speaker 2** And Assembly Speaker Robin Vos will help lead Republicans in the upcoming legislative session.

[00:59:10] **Speaker 3** Vos represents Wisconsin Assembly 63 in Racine County, and here is Speaker Vos with tonight's Republican response. Thank you.

[00:59:19] **Speaker 2** Hello, I'm Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, and I'm honored to give the Republican response tonight. We live in the greatest state in the country with a very bright future ahead of us. Wisconsinites have a work ethic like no other. Strong family values and take pride in going above and beyond for our neighbors. Legislators in Madison have heard from you. We understand the struggles families face all across Wisconsin dealing with this record setting inflation due to the good decisions made by my Republican colleagues over the past decade. We now have a record surplus and ample revenues to address the issues facing our state. While we just heard Democrats seem to want to spend most of the money growing the size of state government, our top priority is to make living here less expensive while maintaining our wonderful quality of life. We know families struggle with inflation on everything from the cost of eggs to the price of a new home. That's why I'm proud Wisconsin Republicans have led the way for the past decade, cutting state and local taxes by over $22 billion. In fact, it was recently announced that Wisconsin families have the lowest tax burden ever recorded. And while we should all take pride in that fact, we still have a long way to go. The states around us Michigan, Illinois and Iowa all have a lower income tax burden than we do. We must do better to remain competitive, and I promise we will. In our last budget, we pass the largest investment in K-12 education in our state's history, reaching two thirds state funding, all without raising income or sales taxes. The pandemic and the response to it have taught us what's important for learning. We know state and local governments made mistakes during COVID and we need to make sure they never happen again. We were reminded that well-trained teachers inside the classroom giving real lessons in reading and math are critical to students success. We also know Zoom lessons aren't effective for most kids, nor are activist agendas that tear our schools apart with woke policies that actually harm students. Republicans won't turn our backs on families whose children have fallen behind in these last few years. While some believe the answer to fixing education is simply spending more money, as we just heard from Governor Evers, Wisconsin already spends over $14,000 per public school student or more than a quarter million dollars per classroom. Taxpayers make a huge investment already in our students, and we have a right to expect results. That's why we need to focus on quality over just spending more money. Now, don't get me wrong, Republicans understand costs are rising for our local schools and local governments, just like they are for our families. Government must do things differently if we have any hope of keeping our tax burden heading in the right direction. When we see two out of every three kids who don't read at their grade level or aren't proficient in math, we have to do something different. Look, I'm a proud product of Wisconsin public schools, but I also know we can and must do more to make our public schools better. While my Democratic colleagues want to make the issue about public versus private schools, school choice isn't just about kids leaving a public school to go to a private one. In fact, in the 20 2122 school year, 71,489 kids open enrolled, leaving one public school to choose a different public school. You see, it's all about parents picking the best school for their children not being trapped in the one where they happen to live. Whether or not it's the right fit for their son or daughter now, the answer ultimately will most likely be some additional funds to keep up with the cost of inflation. But it has to come with accountability to make sure that when kids learn inside the classroom, it actually helps improve their lives and builds a well-educated workforce. Republicans are focused on reforming government, growing the economy and making the right priorities for the state by using the resources that we already have. Our state faces a wide variety of challenges, but one that is at the forefront is simply not having enough workers to be able to fill the existing jobs that we have. Think to yourself, how many times have you gone into a business and they have a help wanted sign in the window? Or perhaps you've gone to a restaurant to discover that half the restaurant is an open because they can't find enough help. With over 102,000 unfilled jobs in Wisconsin today, no one should be sitting on the sidelines. This shouldn't be a partizan issue. And that's why we're putting a question on the April ballot asking you, the citizens of Wisconsin, if able bodied, childless adults should be required to look for work in order to keep getting their taxpayer subsidized welfare benefits. Now, I bet it passes overwhelmingly, and let's hope our liberal colleagues hear you loud and clear and work with us to fix the problem. In this time of divided government, we can find common ground and come together with solutions that face our challenging workforce situation. The voters have said they want us to find ways to work together in a month. The Wisconsin state legislature will hear more spending ideas from Governor Evers on his budget. And let me make a few promises. So, you know. Where we stand. Wisconsin Republicans will not raise your taxes and we won't pass a budget that doesn't have significant tax reform. We will not grow the size of government beyond our ability to pay. We will fight to expand choices for parents in every zip code in Wisconsin. We will make sure our neighbors get a hand up and not a permanent handout. And we will invest in our priorities to make sure that government at every level can operate efficiently. Together, Democrats and Republicans, we can make Wisconsin an even better place to live, work and raise a family. Thank you for joining me tonight. God bless you and your family and God bless the state of Wisconsin. That was Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos with the Republican response.

[01:05:03] **Speaker 3** If you would like to watch tonight's speech from Governor Tony Evers or Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, again, we will have it posted later tonight on our Web site at PBS's Wisconsin Board. We'll have continuing coverage and reaction to the state of the state address this Friday evening at 730 on here and now.

[01:05:22] **Speaker 2** Wisconsin Public Radio will also continue to follow developments from the state capitol, both on the air and online at npr.org. We want to thank you for joining us this evening live from the state capitol in Madison. I'm Shawn Johnson with Wisconsin Public Radio.

[01:05:37] **Speaker 3** And I'm Frederica Freiberg with PBS Wisconsin. Thank you for watching. This concludes our coverage of Wisconsin's 2023 State of the State address.